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ABSTRACT

As part of a series designed to support parents and caregivers of young children in the home, this booklet focuses on providing opportunities for children to learn about music and develop listening skills. The booklet's introductory section focuses on the importance of music in our everyday lives, the role of music in culture and its connection with emotional experience and expression, and children's need for experiences to help them understand the basic elements of music, beat, rhythm, and pitch or tune. The remainder of the booklet is organized into five sections. Sections 1 through 4 describe how infants, toddlers, younger preschoolers, and older preschoolers, respectively, learn about music. These sections outline developmental expectations for each age group and offer suggestions for activities and music-related items to make. Additional activities are suggested for older musically gifted preschoolers and for setting up play areas for music activities. Section 5 suggests titles for useful song books and websites and includes a 9-item bibliography. (KB)

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Learning about musi

By Wyverne Smith

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About the Learning at Home Series

The *Learning at Home Series* has been developed to support parents and carers of young children in their most important task—starting young children on the pathway of a lifetime of living and learning.

The first years of life are the foundation for all later growth, development and learning.

- Early experiences set the pattern for all later learning.
- Early experiences and relationships affect how children feel about themselves, how they get on with other people and how they join in and enjoy life.
- Every experience has an impact. Babies and young children are learning all the time, regardless of whether we think we are 'teaching' them.

Research has shown that a strong foundation in these years starts children on the pathway to:

- being able to relate confidently and effectively with others;
- mental and emotional health; and
- making the most of each child's abilities in education.

Babies and young children are learning all the time.

This research also shows us what kinds of experiences and relationships babies and young children need, to get the best start for living and learning.

What matters is how they are learning and what they are learning. Learning takes place in relationships. If the earliest relationships are warm and loving, babies and young children have the best chance to make the most of the opportunities in their worlds.

To learn best they need parents and carers (their first teachers) who:

- are warm and caring;
- know each baby or child very well and appreciate what is special about them;
- take time to understand the child's messages (cues) and to respond to them with encouragement, praise, comfort, independence and rest as needed; and
- are able to see, share and celebrate the big and small joys and achievements of the children in their care.

There is no set list of things to teach babies and young children.

Living is learning and children learn through living. These books are a guide to how young children learn and how best to help them at the different stages of early childhood. All children and babies have their own abilities and interests.

Adults watch and listen and provide opportunities and support to build on each child's strengths. Babies and children also come from family and cultural backgrounds that are part of the way they are and need to be included in their experiences.

Adults provide responsive and sensitive care, a safe and interesting place to be and follow children's lead in providing things they like to do ... children do the learning.

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Learning at Home Series, No.3, 2003

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Wyverne Smith is a member of the Early Childhood Education Team at the University of Southern Queensland. Besides extensive experience in a wide range of early childhood education contexts, a large part of her teaching has been in music. This includes a number of years as an early keyboard and piano teacher at the Bathurst Music Centre (Charles Sturt University), and later as a primary schools music specialist in Education Queensland. In addition she has taught piano and recorder to many young children individually. As a mother of five, she has also inspired her own children to 'learn music at home'.

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Early Childhood Australia Inc. (ECA) actively promotes the provision of high quality services for all young children from birth to eight years and their families, and supports the important role of parents. ECA is also the national umbrella organisation for children's services. ECA is a leading specialist early childhood publisher.

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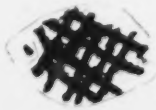

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Learning about music

Music means many things to many people. We have all had unique experiences that have helped to form our adult feelings about music. However, it is almost certain that when you first held your baby, you cuddled her and rocked her. It is even likely that you sang to your baby. Music seems to be a natural instinct that surpasses any hang up that we may have acquired about our musical ability.

Music is all around us—in the war cry at the football match, at the party, on the radio, in the shopping centre, in the doctor's waiting room. It is part of our culture and it can influence and express our emotions. It is because of this connection with emotion that music is part of our life's rituals such as weddings and funerals. It is traditional and helps us celebrate in many ways. What would Christmas be without special Christmas music? And what would a birthday be without the *'Happy Birthday'* song?

So why learn music at home? Like any enjoyable experience, learning some of the skills involved makes the experience even better. Many adults envy those who are lucky enough to be able to make music either on an instrument or with their voice. And we now know that the ideal time to learn new skills is in the first few years of life. Not everybody will become a professional musician, but everybody has a right to sing, dance and make music.

Do you remember singing or chanting songs such as *'I'm the king of the castle and you're the dirty rascal'*, *'Rain rain, go away. Come again another day'* and *'Ring a ring a rosy'*? These simple songs are easiest for children. Perhaps you remember the skipping or 'elastics' chants you did in the playground. These childhood songs and chants contain the basic elements of music.

The basic elements of music are beat, rhythm and pitch (tune). To enjoy music more, we can develop our listening skills, including our appreciation of the special choice and arrangement of words used in songs and rhymes. Children need experiences that will help them to understand and 'feel' these elements. The good news is that the experiences recommended in this book are fun for all—children and adults.

Doing what comes naturally

Adults naturally rock when they nurse a baby. Adults naturally engage in 'baby talk' with babies and this 'baby talk' is actually very musical.

- ☐ 'Baby talk' is higher in pitch than speech: 'Who's a gorgeous baby?' etc.
- ☐ Babies make sounds that are more musical than speech: 'bub, bub, bub'.
- ☐ 'Baby talk' is rhythmic (or has a beat).
- ☐ Adults' 'baby talk' goes up at the end to attract the baby and goes down to calm the baby.
- ☐ Adult and baby mimic each other, like a conversation.
- ☐ 'Baby talk' often consists of repeated patterns.

How do babies feel about music?

Have you noticed the reactions of babies when exposed to music?

- Most babies stop crying or smile when they are sung to, whether it is a lullaby or a surprise or tickle song.
- They enjoy a 'conversation' and respond with musical noises and smiles.
- They are soothed by rhythmic stroking or patting.
- They respond, smile and laugh at touch songs such as the well-known *'This little piggy went to market'*.
- They respond well when adults touch them in time to music either on the radio, CD or live.
- They smile and laugh when they are bounced on adults' knees to songs such as *'This is the way the lady rides'*.
- They enjoy the sounds of rattles, bells and music boxes.

Things to do:

Older babies

- Move gently to the rhythm of music when you hold the baby, or move their arms or feet to the beat of the music you hear.
- Say or sing rhymes and body touching rhymes such as *'This little piggy'* and *'Round and round the garden'*.
- Hang musical mobiles for baby to hit, accidentally at first.
- Reinforce the sounds that baby makes by imitating them.
- Talk often to babies, keeping eye contact. Babies will try to copy your sounds and also your lip and tongue movements.
- Gently bounce baby on your knee, being careful to support the head, neck and back until they are strong enough to support themselves. Sing bouncy songs such as *'Ride a cock horse'* and *'This is the way the lady rides'*.
- Sing action songs while moving baby's limbs, such as *'Take you riding in my car, car'* or *'Eency weency spider'*.
- Sing songs such as 'Wash your dirty face' (to the tune of *'The Farmer in the Dell'*) or 'What a dirty nappy' while attending to baby's needs.
- Clapping your or the baby's hands to songs such as *'Clap, clap, clap your hands'* or *'My hands are clapping'*.
- Sing *'Old MacDonald had a Farm'* while baby holds the particular plastic animal.
- Expose baby to a wide range of music from CD's or radio eg. Classical and world music; children's music. Hold the baby in your arms and dance to the music.

Things to do

The first three months

Sing simple songs softly and often. Remember that very young babies have very sensitive ears. Sing to soothe, while you rock the baby. Sing while you change a nappy, or while dressing or giving the baby a bath. Perhaps you would like to sing softly while the baby is feeding. While the baby is tiny, it doesn't matter what words you use. It is the smile you give, the way you hold the baby and the softness and love in your voice that is important.

Move gently to the rhythm of music when you hold babies.

Beware of loud, aggressive music as this may disturb very young babies.

Hold the baby close to you and say their name in a soft high-pitched voice. For example, 'Suzie, Suzie, I love you'. Then sing or say the same words in a soft, low-pitched voice. Responding to high and low pitches is one of the more highly developed abilities in young babies.

Things to make

Safety hints

When making toys for small children, it is essential to be one step ahead of the children. Use your imagination as to what a child might do with the toy. All attached parts must be glued or sewn with the utmost care. Small parts such as dried beans, buttons and rice can choke a baby, so shaker containers need to be securely closed. The substances used to glue or sew must be non-poisonous as the toy will most likely be put in your baby's mouth. Any paint used to colour the toy must be lead-free of course, and free of other possible poisons.
In spite of this extreme care, it goes without saying that young children need to be supervised at all times and that all play with toys needs close supervision.

1. Tambourine

(to hang within reach of baby's hand or foot)

Materials

Foil pie pan (safe because of the folded edges)
3 metal buttons (brass or silver coat buttons) with loops on the back
bright yarn, possibly bright colours

Instructions

- Punch 3 pairs of close-together small holes along rim of pie pan, leaving 5cms between pairs.
- Thread about 18cms of yarn through loops on backs of buttons.
- Hang a button by yarn through each pair of holes and tie tightly on outside of pie pan. Buttons should hang down about 5cms inside the pan rim.
- Below holes for the middle button, punch 2 more holes, 5cms apart.
- Put 60cms length of yarn through these holes and tie the ends in a double knot and bow to form a hanging cord. Suspend pan with buttons on top, hanging down into pan.

Safety: Make sure that the buttons are securely tied to the pan. (Garland Burt, K., & Kalkstein, K., 1981)

2. Rattles that roll

Fill any cylinders with rattling objects, e.g. lentils, rice, pebbles. Secure both ends carefully. Paint or cover with contact.

Safety: Make sure that baby cannot open the rattle. You may need to glue the ends with super glue.

3. Surprise box

Take a box and fill with articles that make sounds. Some examples are large keys on a secure key ring, metal spoons, wooden spoons, Tupperware container with an article inside, musical rattle, plastic bottle filled with water. Babies will enjoy exploring the articles in the box. They will look, shake, listen, feel and probably taste. This is the way babies learn.

Development: What to expect

Most outstanding at this age is development of speech and mobility, and the battle for independence. Toddlers begin to walk and climb, and, in a most remarkable way, begin to speak. With speech, toddlers are able to make their needs known, even though their speech consists of two or three-word sentences. This new development allows toddlers to respond to and enjoy music in many ways.

- Toddlers begin to 'dance' when they hear music.
- They create their own one or two-word songs when they are playing.
- They enjoy a song or rhyme that is dramatised with the voice: 'Little' Miss Muffet ... and *frightened* Miss Muffet away'.
- They demand repetition of songs, stories or sounds that have amused them ('More!' or 'Do it again!').
- They mix traditional songs with their own made up ones.
- They enjoy action songs and finger plays when they are asked to touch body parts, for example, *'Heads, shoulders, knees and toes'*.
- They enjoy exploring to see if they can make noises out of anything they find.
- They enjoy playing any musical game with adults, such as holding hands and rowing together with *'Row, row, row your boat'*.
- They sometimes make a response (a little delayed) after they hear music or see dance.

Things to do

1. Bath games

Continue with the baby bath songs, but add more, especially songs about the bath toys—frog and duck songs such as *'Glug glug went the little green frog one day'* and *'All the fish are swimming in the water'*.

2. Finger plays

Toddlers are beginning to gain a little control over their fingers and enjoy some of the easier, interactive songs, such as *'Open, shut them'* and *'Put your finger on your nose'*.

3. Games on the floor

Rocking songs such as *'Row, row, row your boat'* and rolling the ball songs such as 'Roll, roll, roll the ball' are good songs to help toddlers 'feel' the beat.

4. Crawling games

Songs and rhymes that were used as tickly songs for babies can be used while toddlers crawl. *'Slowly, slowly, very slowly, creeps the garden snail'* and *'How does the caterpillar go?'* are two good examples.

Things to do

Place marbles or other objects that make interesting sounds inside a metal tin or other container.

Tape the lid securely, making sure there are no sharp edges.

Give the container to the toddler and encourage them to shake it while you both sing.

Sing a familiar tune like *'Old MacDonald had a Farm'*.

Next, in a sing-song voice, sing the words 'One, two, cha cha cha.'

Show the child how to shake the tin on 'cha, cha, cha.'

Repeat several times. Soon the toddler will understand to shake the tin on 'cha cha cha'.

5. Rhymes

Use appropriate rhymes at times such as meal times, going in the car and getting dressed, such as *'Jelly on the plate'*, *'Take you riding in the car'* and *'Mary wore a red dress'*.

6. Sensory experiences

Toddlers learn by hearing, seeing and touching. Help toddlers to be aware of the sounds, such as sirens (imitate the sound) and the purring of a kitten (allow the toddler to feel the cat as it purrs).

7. Cha Cha Cha (12–15 months)

- Place marbles or other objects that make interesting sounds inside a metal tin or other container.
- Tape the lid securely, making sure there are no sharp edges.
- Give the container to the toddler and encourage them to shake it while you both sing.
- Sing a familiar tune like *'Old MacDonald had a Farm'*.
- Next, in a sing-song voice, sing the words *'One, two, cha cha cha.'*
- Show the child how to shake the tin on 'cha, cha, cha.'
- Repeat several times. Soon the toddler will understand to shake the tin on 'cha cha cha'.

8. Instrument Fun (18–24 months)

- Make paper bag shakers. Decorate the bags and fill them with a few dried beans or rice. Tie securely. Shake while you and the toddler sing your favourite songs.
- Make a drum from a round container. Cover the open end with adhesive-backed plastic (e.g. contact). The smaller the container, the higher pitched the sound; the larger the container, the lower the sound.
- Put stones, beads or buttons into empty film or plastic containers and securely fasten with super glue.

9. Dance

Play waltz music. Take the child's hands or hold the child in your arms and waltz.

Younger preschoolers

Development: What to expect

Most three year olds can use language quite fluently to communicate with you and will listen to reason. Most are now able to walk backwards, jump, gallop and run. They can sing a recognisable song. Sometimes they will recognise a song, but may not be able to reproduce it. They will sing a song appropriately, such as singing a soft song to rock the doll to sleep. They now enjoy repeating known songs over and over again. They move spontaneously to music. Most have the coordination to play an 'instrument' such as a drum. They can listen to a very short piece of music.

Things to do

1. Eency weency spider

Eency weency spider went up the waterspout (go up the xylophone or hit two sticks together).

Down came the rain and washed the spider out (go down the xylophone or hit 2 cymbals—aluminium pie pans or saucepan lids).

Out came the sun and dried up all the rain (use a triangle or hit two spoons together lightly).

And eency weency spider went up the spout again (go up the xylophone or hit two sticks together).

2. What's the word?

Sing a song the child likes. When you are sure the child knows the words, begin to leave out words. Start by leaving out the last word of the line.

3. Rhythm robot

'Make up a sound as you move one arm in and out. For example, 'blip, blip, blip'. Your child will have wonderful ideas for sounds. Make up a different sound as you walk in a steady beat, maybe 'dook, dook, dook'(sic). Try walking and making the walking sound and move your arm to the arm sound. You can make up sounds for many different moving parts—nodding your head, sticking out your tongue and moving your elbows in and out' (Silberg, 1998).

4. Dancing

Free dance to music such as Debussy's *'Clair de Lune'*, Rimsky Korsakov's *'Flight of the Bumble Bee'*, Saint Saens' *'Carnival of Animals'* and Tchaikovsky's *'Nutcracker Suite'*. There are many more examples.

5. Listening

We become accustomed to noise, including music in the supermarket, and we don't really 'listen'. Children in particular have become so accustomed to relying on visuals and sound together in order to understand, such as with television, that we need to give them more opportunities to develop their listening skills.

6. Find the musical toy (wind up or battery operated)

Hide a musical toy and ask the child to find it. Take turns—allow the child to hide the toy.

7. Freeze

Play a CD and ask the child to move to the music, but to 'freeze' when the music stops.

Singing with the rhythm

The beat is similar to heartbeat or the tick of a clock. It is regular, like marching.

The *rhythm* is the pattern of *all* the sounds or syllables of a song or rhyme. Give every sound (syllable) a clap. Clap on the circles for the rhythm patterns below.

kang (g)a roo

Off to bed

Jon-a-than Smith

Jen-nif-er Mc-Don-ald

Ring a ring a ro-sy

Dogs and cats

Come to din - ner

Older preschoolers

Development: What to expect

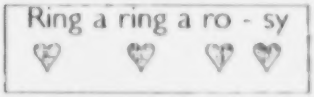
Most four and five year olds enjoy imaginative play although they may have some trouble distinguishing between the real and the imagined. They love dramatic play. They love nonsense rhymes and silly songs. They have much better control over their bodies. They can now notice the changes in music—faster or slower, higher or lower. They can clap their hands to the beat and can sing simple children's songs accurately. They have difficulty singing 'pop' songs as these are often too complicated. Many Disney songs are in a 'pop' style and although children of this age may enjoy singing them, don't expect accuracy. They like to make up their own songs and love to play their own 'accompaniment' on instruments such as a xylophone, piano or toy guitar. They like to 'dance' in an uninhibited way. Some five year olds like to perform on their own. They like to participate in a story by making the accompanying music with percussion instruments.

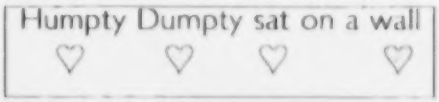
Knowing the difference between 'beat' and 'rhythm' is a basic music skill and four year olds are just beginning to master it. If you find it a difficult concept, as some people do, don't worry about it. Just enjoy moving to the music. But if you do understand the difference between beat and rhythm, show your child how to make sounds and actions that practise the skill.

Things to do:

1. Singing with beat

The beat is similar to heartbeat or the tick of a clock. It is regular, like marching. Here are some examples – the little hearts show you where to clap, click fingers, step or beat the drum.





2. Singing with the rhythm

The *rhythm* is the pattern of *all* the sounds or syllables of a song or rhyme. Use the same actions but give every sound (syllable) a clap. (See pg. 14)

3. Listening

One way is to close your eyes and listen to the sounds around you. In a few moments, open your eyes and try to remember what you have heard. This can be done anywhere—in your own home, in a nearby park, or in any suitable location.

4. Recording sounds

Pre-record sounds such as the boiling kettle, microwave bell, doorbell or water running. Have the children listen and identify the sounds.

5. Matching and sorting sounds

Fill some containers with various articles such as rice, marbles or sticks. Make some of them the same. Children can find the matching sounds or sort from the loudest to the softest.

What if my child is gifted musically?

The good news is that the musical activities suggested in this book for young children are also recommended for musically gifted children. The best early experiences for *all* children, including preparation for a possible career as a musician are:

- Plenty of listening to expressive music, such as ballet music (e.g. *'Nutcracker Suite'* by Tchaikovsky) and story music (e.g. *'Peter and the Wolf'* by Prokofiev).
- Opportunities to go to the ballet, concerts of children's performances, circuses, pantomimes and puppet shows.
- Viewing videos of the above if live performances are impossible to access.
- Opportunities to move to music. Creative movement in the lounge room is a great start, graduating to dancing or gymnastics later. Activities that encourage children to involve their whole body with the music help them to be really expressive in their music making later on. (Have you noticed how some performing musicians seem just to play or sing notes while other musicians play or sing with the power to really move you emotionally?)
- Beat and rhythmic action games (as above).
- Experiences with nature that develop an awareness of all the senses.
- Opportunities to encourage creativity as well as to develop hand and finger strength and control, and hand-eye coordination such as drawing, painting and play with play dough and clay.
- Play—imaginative and creative. Children learn most through their play if the environment is right.

Setting up your play area

We can plan so that what children choose to do will be valuable. A little time taken to set up in the mornings so that children are free to move from one experience to another will be well worth the trouble. Some examples of what you can prepare for are:

- A box of home-made musical instruments outside on a rug or in a special box.
- A cassette-recorder with selections of songs or pieces of music. This could be outside on a mat under a tree, with old cushions that look inviting. Or it could be inside in a similar corner.
- If you are lucky enough to have real instruments, such as a piano, organ, keyboard, recorder, xylophone or chime bars, make these available,

but perhaps not all at once. Children can learn to treat these valuable instruments with care. Try to be positive, praising gentle use, but when the children need to make loud music, show them how to do it correctly. Remember that musicians do make loud music. If you are having a bad day and do not feel like listening to loud music, put quieter activities out.

- Have some dress-up clothes and props to go with the recorded music. Pieces of tulle on an elastic waistband make fairy or ballet tutus. Bright red material can make a Spanish dancer. Scarves can be turned into just about anything. Colourful old clothes from the 'op' shop can be clown outfits.
- Puppets can be put into a box and a table used for a stage. Have puppets to match the music, for example, animal puppets for the *'Carnival of Animals'*.
- Older children can use bottles and water to make their own musical instruments, filling each bottle to a different level and hitting the bottles with a spoon or suitable stick.

You are important

The human part in the 'Learning about Music' is the most crucial. It begins with the very first reassuring lullaby sung to a tiny baby and moves on to loving support of a child's enjoyment of music or to the much-needed support and encouragement of a budding musician.

- If adults give children freedom to experiment, to explore and to play (within suitable limits known and understood by all in the family or group), children will have confidence in themselves. They will learn and will be creative.
- If adults sing to and with them, children will grow up singing and expressing themselves through music.
- If adults help children to involve their whole body in making music, children will be able to produce rhythmic, beautiful and sensitive music that communicates to others.
- If adults affirm children's attempts to make music, children will believe in their own ability and creativity.

If adults do these four things, children will be helped to develop their self-confidence and a sense of wellbeing.

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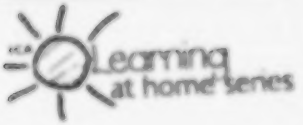

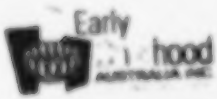

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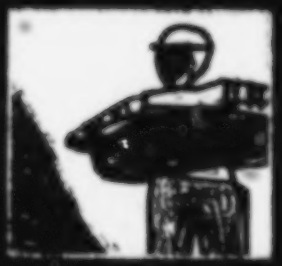

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